

Mid-Session Update

This week in the Senate has certainly been fast-paced. We were able to debate many more bills than we expected, setting a great pace for how I hope the remainder of session will go.

The governor signed the Children's Mental Health Reform Act into law on Wednesday, making it the first Senate bill signed into law this session. This legislation, which I sponsored, will give basic mental services to all children by waiving the economic means test that is normally used to determine treatment eligibility. It will also end the horrific situation our state has seen, in which parents are being forced to relinquish custody of their children to the state in order to secured treatment for their children. The bill will take effect on August 28, 2004 and stop this erosion of families.

A bill that I am co-sponsoring to help contain the costs of prescription medications for eligible citizens received final approval in the Senate this week and was sent to the House. This measure would create the Prescription Drug Repository Program in the state's Department of Health and Senior Services by Jan. 1, 2005. It allows clinics, hospitals and individuals to donate sealed, unopened prescription medication to the repository, which could then be redistributed, at low or no cost, to individuals needing the medication who may otherwise not be able to afford it.

The Senate also heard debate on the important issue of the Sunshine Law in our state. We passed a bill that would allow citizens and the press better access to public meetings and records. Senate Bill 1020 would put a \$0.10 limit on the per-page charges for copies of public records. The bill also increases the fines for public officials who violate the open meetings and open records law.

Senate Bill 718, known as the Small Business Regulatory Relief Act, was also approved and sent to the House. This bill would help businesses that have difficulty dealing with state rules and regulations and would create a new panel to help resolve those problems. This measure would establish a small-business regulatory fairness board to serve as a liaison between state agencies and small businesses in Missouri. It would also require state agencies to prepare and publish an impact statement on proposed rules that would affect small businesses.

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